

THE MISSING PIECE

Paragon Honda Paves the Way with Personalized Customer Experiences

As a dealership partner and industry leader, Brian Benstock knows the importance of staying ahead of the technology curve. For many years, the general manager and vice president of Paragon Honda and Paragon Acura in Queens, NY has made keynote speeches at industry events across the country encouraging dealers to leap into the new age of the frictionless customer experience, or risk getting left behind.

“Customers are getting smarter, so dealers need to get smarter and develop ways to accommodate them while continually improving the customer experience.”

“There is a great quote by Steve Jobs that says, ‘You have to start with the customer experience and work backwards to the technology.’ That is exactly what we’ve done here at Paragon,” Benstock said.

David Boice, co-founder and CEO of Team Velocity, said Benstock has paved the way for integrated technology that puts the customer first.

“Brian is one of the few retailers that I know who always pushes for something far better than what everybody else does,” Boice said. “I think it’s inherent in his personality and in the culture of their dealership to look for better ways to do things to serve their customers. He also happens to be passionate about the online customer experience. Fortunately, he and I share a kind of a tenacity around improving the customer’s experience online. Brian tends to lead the pack because he’s a maverick personality combined with a tenacious desire to improve his customer’s online experience.”

Benstock said his dealerships went into 2020 looking to simplify. “This meant removing some of the fragmented technologies we had in order to help our customers. When a vendor sells you a solution to benefit your customers, it sounds great, but when you add it to the suite of other widgets on your website, it can sometimes prevent the customer from doing business with you.

You have to look at the entire customer journey and ensure the technology is seamless throughout the transaction,” he said.

Benstock credits Team Velocity’s Apollo Customer Experience Platform (CXP) for making the frictionless experience possible for his dealerships.

“We’ve been leveraging a customer experience platform called Apollo; it powers everything from our sales and service retention strategies to our website,” he said. “It is a fully integrated customer experience platform that ties all our marketing to our website. It is essential to power our marketing dollars.”

One of Apollo’s main objectives is the ability to create a personalized and frictionless shopping experience for every customer, dynamically customized to their unique information. Consumers never are put off by discrepancies between the offers they receive via mail, email or even what they see on Google and what they encounter on the dealership’s website. Even better, the experience starkly contrasts that of an anonymous consumer looking for a vehicle.

“Our customers see the same price on the website as they do a Google search ad. So many times, we see competitors promoting offers, and when you go to their website, you can’t find the offer anywhere,” Benstock said.

"(With Apollo) the system already knows that, for example, Susan is driving a Honda Accord, she's bought two," Boice explained. "She is in equity, and when you click on that price, let's say a CR-V is \$264.97, down to the penny, your email will say \$264.97. When you click on the email, it'll land you on a CR-V in stock that you can upgrade to that's \$264.97. When you go and check it out in Google, it's \$264.97. When you go to YouTube, it's \$264.97. When you go to Facebook, it's \$264.97, etc."

Boice lamented dealerships' lack of personalization, reflecting that Panera Bread can remember his lunch order, but dealerships across the country don't have the capability for a customer to sign in and be treated like a returning customer.

"From search to signature, I want it to be seamless," he continued. "I'd like for my customers to be able to sign into their own personal website, like Amazon, like American Airlines, like Netflix..."

"We have been fighting an ecosystem of siloed applications for five years," Boice said. "When we first started, Brian was using some of the leading companies in this space, which don't integrate at all with each other or anything else. As a matter of fact, most of the time, they're archenemies. So, we had to take a different approach. It's been a five-year journey of building a new and integrated technology platform."

"Apollo is a long-term effort to think about the customer experience, and then build technology to accommodate the ideal customer experience versus what we have in our industry," Boice added.

Customers are getting smarter, so dealers need to get smarter and develop ways to accommodate them while continually improving the customer experience.

"The reason why your Amazon experience is so great is because it's integrated," Boice said. "Amazon knows you. They know what you like to buy. They recommend things for you that are in line with that. They curate an experience that's wonderful for each customer. The technology they use for both of us is the same. Yet, a car dealer is supposed to go do that with 15 separate (mostly competing) companies?"

Benstock particularly likes Apollo's ability to use existing customer data in their DMS to tailor their process to the individual.

"Consumers today are demanding that we make it faster for them, we make it more convenient and we wow them everywhere," he stated.

"I say it all the time," he continued. "My website sits on top of my DMS, which means it is sucking out data and using that data to target and market my customers. When my previous customers come to my website, they get an Amazon-like experience. They don't have to enter in their NAP (name, address, phone). We already have that information. Also, we have a ton of data on our customers — why not share that information with the customer, like their service history, recall alerts, etc.?"



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He also credits Apollo's CXP for increasing their service scheduling.

"Having an integrated service scheduler has made all the difference. It takes less than a minute for a customer to schedule a service appointment with Apollo because our website knows who you are. We've found that doing what is best for the customer ends up being what's best for you," Benstock said.

Customers are responding well to the changes — even through the midst of a pandemic.

"Within the first month of launching our new website, we saw a 25% increase in service appointments made online," Benstock said. "Which makes sense because we made it easier for customers to do business with us."

"Our site traffic is up year-over-year and month-over-month and, more importantly, our phone calls are down! I know that might not sound like a good thing, but we are excited about that! We look at our site like OpenTable. Who calls a restaurant to make a reservation? You don't, you go online. That reminds me of a quote a good friend of mine, Andrew Diffenderfer, said, 'We no longer go online, we live online.' And it's true; customers don't want to come to your dealership, nor do they want to sit on hold for five minutes to make an appointment. We've integrated our pickup and delivery process into our service scheduler. We've made it easier for our customers to do business with us," Benstock said.

Being on the cutting edge of technology has helped Paragon Honda and Paragon Acura not only survive through the pandemic, but to reconstruct the buying process and succeed.

"Our dealership was in the epicenter for the pandemic. We had to close our doors. Without the use of technology, we could not have survived. From the shopping experience, to the finance process, everything had to be done online. We delivered over 700 cars online — without having a single customer come to the dealership. That is the power of having an integrated customer experience platform," Benstock concluded.